

## **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS ON TRANSPORTATION EQUITY**

**Prepared by The Providence Plan for the R.I. Statewide Planning Program  
based upon the Community Outreach Efforts and Focus Group Discussions  
held in Providence neighborhoods February, 2001**

### **TRANSPORTATION FOR JOB ACCESS**

Eighty percent of Providence's FIP clients do not own cars. Ensuring a stable income for the State's poorest residents through access to jobs is critical. According to a Rhode Island College survey of FIP recipients, , 50% need to transfer twice to reach their destination, 50% do not trust their vehicle to get them to the intended destination, majority of respondents take their children to school on their way to work, and 32% reported after one year that they were no longer at jobs because of transportation difficulties.

#### **Increase allocation of funds for the DHS/RIPTA Access to Jobs/Reverse Commute Program.**

Rhode Island's Access to Jobs/Reverse Commute program received \$2.2 million in the most recent TIP. This represents a significant increase over the initial \$1.26 million allocated and a positive trend that should be continued to allow full benefits of the program statewide.

#### **Expand the Access to Jobs/Reverse Commute Program to include additional municipalities and welfare populations.**

Currently, approximately half of Rhode Island's communities benefit from increased RIPTA service through the Access to Jobs/Reverse Commute program. Increased funding and program expansion will help ensure that additional unemployed populations experiencing transportation difficulties benefit from access to the program.

#### **Use the Bridges to Work model to involve employers in provision of transportation for low-income employees.**

Bridges to Work is a HUD initiative that connects inner-city work-residents with suburban employment opportunities through local partners that provide job placement, transportation, and support services. A four-year demonstration phase of the program recently concluded in five of the country's largest metropolitan programs. More than \$16 million dollars were allocated to the initial phase from HUD and private foundations.

#### **Incorporate additional state agencies as partners in addressing transportation inequities in job access.**

The Department of Labor and Training and the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation should be incorporated into discussions with partner transportation agencies. DLT identifies potential employers for

Rhode Island residents, and should engage in discussions with such employers about the need to ensure transportation for urban residents. As the agency that markets state-owned properties for development, such as properties at Quonset Point, RIEDC should elevate jobs access at suburban locations as a priority for economically-disadvantaged Rhode Islanders.

**Provide incentives for employers to offer transportation to low-income employees lacking reliable transportation options.**

Rite Works, a DHS incentive-based program, offers wage subsidies and tax breaks to employers who hire FIP participants. Federal programs augment state incentives. A similar incentive-based program for suburban employers who offer transportation for FIP participants or other low-income urban residents could increase the likelihood that urban residents can access and maintain well-paying jobs outside of the city.

**Investigate possibilities for car purchase assistance.**

Automobile ownership is exceedingly costly (upwards of \$4,000 annually according to the Surface Transportation Policy Project), however ownership can directly impact residents' independence. North Carolina, Tennessee, and New Jersey have experimented with programs to help low-income families purchase vehicles.

## **TRANSIT**

The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority serves Rhode Island's poorest residents. As such, their facilities and services have a direct impact on transportation equity. The following recommendations were developed from public input in focus groups and surveys.

**Install measures to ensure that buses run according to schedule.**

Require drivers to check-in at stops.

Update schedules if times between stops are impractical or unattainable as a result of traffic or increased use.

**Expand mid-day, evening, and weekend hours of all regular RIPTA routes.**

Use of vans or trolleys may help offset costs of operating large buses during off-peak times.

Extend trolley service into areas other than downtown.

Coordinate hours of service with social service agencies, major employers, and supermarkets/shopping centers.

**Provide flexible alternatives for residents using buses for activities such as grocery shopping.**

Similar to flex service in other communities, provide a small van to pick up passengers after they have completed grocery shopping. Charge more for van service, but less than residents would pay if forced to take a taxi.

**Provide multilingual print information at multiple locations.**

Suggested locations include on buses, and at bus stops and convenience stores.

Spanish and predominant Southeast Asians languages are necessary.

**Make transit use safe for riders both on and off of buses.**

Install distress/“panic boxes” at bus stops.

Improve lighting at stops and shelters.

Install assistance/security personnel at Kennedy Plaza and on buses.

Install additional bus shelters along all RITPA routes.

**Improve customer service by RIPTA drivers to all transit users.**

Require cultural competence training for all RIPTA drivers and other personnel.

Require drivers to announce stops and route information.

Create a discretionary policy for drivers to allow free ridership in extenuating circumstances.

Provide comments cards for RIPTA users to express their satisfaction.

**Ensure that use of transit service by disabled customers and the elderly does not compromise their self-esteem.**

Require drivers to stop at all bus stops and for all customers.

Regularly inspect lifts for handicapped accessibility on buses.

Enforce restricted seating for elderly and handicapped riders.

**Make transit use more affordable for low-income residents.**

Create a transportation fund for income eligible individuals to assist with costs of bus passes.

Modify bus pass policy for students. This is especially important during inclement weather and for students who live several miles from their school.

Advertise existing programs that benefit economically-disadvantaged residents and FIP recipients.

Develop a more convenient option for Rite Care recipients to access free bus passes.

## **PEDESTRIANS**

Given the economic realities of automobile ownership, low-income individuals are more likely to walk to destinations. Pedestrian improvements at locations in Providence’s neighborhoods will benefit all city residents, particularly those who do not have access to automobiles.

**Target intersections for pedestrian safety improvements in neighborhoods with significant low income and non-white populations.**

RIDOT accident data can serve to identify locations where vehicular and pedestrian-related accidents are most likely to occur. For example, four pedestrians were injured at the corner of Hartford Avenue and Bodell Avenue; 3 at Douglas Avenue and Filmore Street, and 2 at the intersection of Doyle Avenue and North Main Street.

**Install alternative signals at intersections to alert motorists that pedestrians have activated the walk signal.**

Suggestions such as a flashing strobe affixed to the traffic light would attract drivers attention. This is particularly important given right-on-red laws.

**Improve crosswalk design citywide to make them more visible to drivers.**

Suggestions include zebra-striping within crosswalks and additional signage.

**Launch an educational campaign aimed at motorists and pedestrians.**

Drivers need to know the law regarding pedestrian safety and the importance of heeding pedestrian rights. Similarly, education aimed at pedestrians should stress using crosswalks.

**Enforce traffic laws that require vehicles to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks and at intersections.**

Pedestrians may be more likely to use a crosswalk if they know that motorists will stop for them.

**Expand neighborhood traffic calming measures to additional areas of the city.**

Concerns about existing measures generally pertain to inadequate signage alerting drivers and over-design of speed bumps. Encourage participation of local residents in design of traffic calming measures.

**Redesign curb cuts and improve sidewalk conditions to facilitate movement of wheelchair assisted travelers.**

**Enforce city snow removal policies.**

**Permit property owners and tenants to request sidewalk repairs over the phone, online and through the mail.**

Currently the property owner must appear in person at the Providence Public Works Department to request a sidewalk repair. Tenants may not apply.

**Establish maximum setback distances to discourage suburban-style setbacks with parking facilities in front of the building.**

Infill structures set closer to the street elevate pedestrian access over vehicular access. Such setbacks would then require parking lots to be constructed to the side of or behind a structure.

## **BICYCLES**

Providence is now in the design phase for bicycle lanes on several main streets through the city. The following recommendations can be incorporated in the design and construction phases.

**Design concepts should incorporate minimum acceptable widths to ensure bicyclists safety.**

**Bike lanes need to have adequate striping, signage, and, when possible, physical barriers to separate bike lanes from motor vehicles and make them clearly visible to motorists.**

**Establish a bicycle lane maintenance hotline to allow comments and requests from bicyclists.**

**Install bike parking facilities at public properties such as schools, community centers, and libraries. Encourage businesses to provide bike parking options.**

## **OTHER**

**Create a local program to assist with vehicle access.**

Car sharing programs in several US cities allow individuals who do not need or cannot afford a car, access to a vehicle anytime they need it. Existing car sharing programs require individuals to pay for the hours a car is used and miles driven. Typically insurance and gas are covered in a one-time membership fee (\$25). This type of program could help free families from the costly burdens of auto ownership and allow people the needed freedom of a vehicle for grocery shopping, recreation outings, etc.